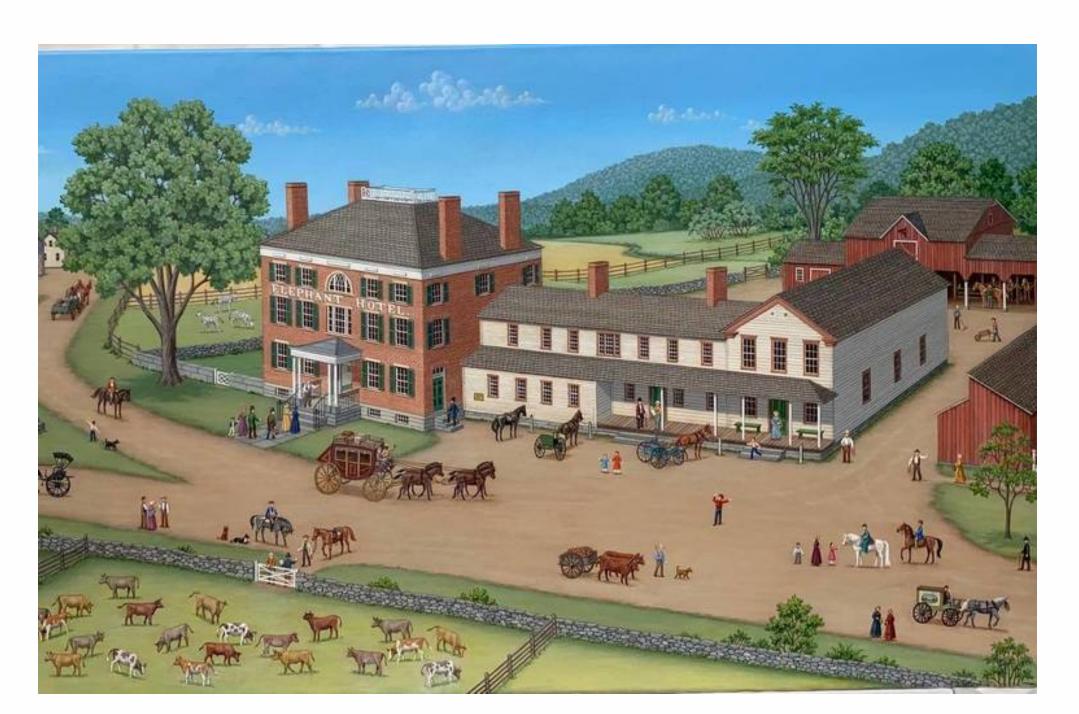
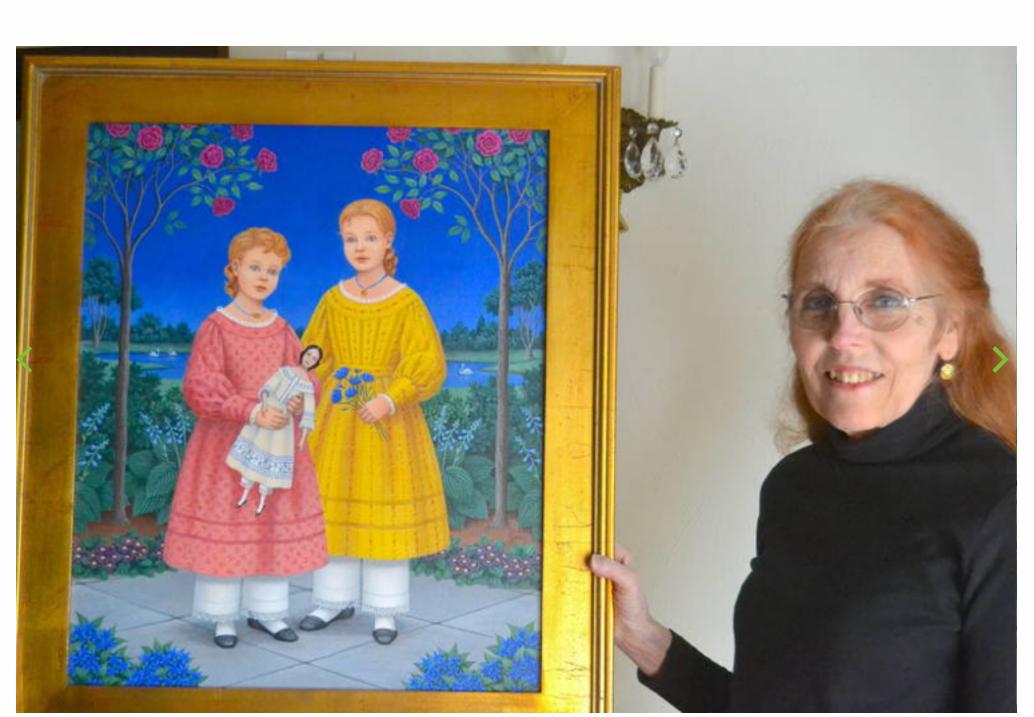
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Slyman's 'Elephant Hotel' Brings Us Back



A painting of the Elephant Hotel by Susan Slyman, noted folk artist and long time resident of Somers. Photo Credit: Susan Slyman



Susan Slyman with one of her original paintings of two young girls in period costume. Photo Credit: Abby Luby

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SOMERS, N.Y. - It's the creak of old wagon wheels, horse hooves clopping on a dirt road and the squeals of children playing beneath the gold-plated circus elephant in front of the Somers' Elephant Hotel around 1840. This is the scene recreated by renowned folk artist Susan Slyman in her new painting "Elephant Hotel."

Slyman, a long-time resident of Somers, worked from older drawings and images provided by the historical society. Many former sections and features of the building previously demolished reappear in Slyman's painting, including the once adjoining bank at the right front corner of the hotel and the red wooden barn behind the building, now a parking lot.

"I imagined the barn as best I could," says Slyman, a sprightly woman with sparkling blue eyes. What is incredibly exceptional in this historical representation is the keen sense of vibrant life, as if Slyman was personally connected to the people in the painting, who they were and where they were going.

"I paint very slowly to build up layer on layer," Slyman explains. "All the little people in the painting have their own personalities, their own stories – some are funny. I don't see it as a flat image, I'm flying around through it all in three dimensions."

Born in Washington DC, Slyman's youth was steeped in art. As Slyman reflects on her childhood, one can imagine her born with a small pencil or crayon in her hand. She grew up seeing her father, an electrical engineer, always drawing wire diagrams, and Slyman followed suit. "I saw drawing going on around me and thought that was what one did," she recalls.

As an active toddler always engrossed in drawing animals, by the age of three she developed a small lump on her tiny finger. By the time she was 12, she had perfected drawing facial features and animals, especially horses. "I had a definite style," she says.

Her mother took her to many art galleries in the capital area and when Slyman was older, she traveled with her parents to Europe and visited several museums and art galleries there as well.

Her real awakening to the folk art genre however was when she was 18 and worked as a costume interpreter at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, the largest outdoor history museum in the Northeast depicting 1830s rural New England.

"That's where I saw a portrait by John Brewster Jr. of his parents (circa 1800)," she recalls. "I thought 'I want to paint like that."

In college, Slyman majored in biological science aiming to become a veterinarian because she "grew up with animals, especially horses." But female vets were not common in the 1960s. "Many veterinarian schools would not look kindly on a female applicant, so I took courses in folk lore and medieval mythology, lots of Chaucer and Shakespeare. It was great, I read a lot."

Fast-forward to the 1970s when Susan and her husband Bill Slyman (now deceased) were living in Mount Kisco. Slyman had been working on portraits of children and women in 1790 period costumes. When an antique dealer saw one of Slyman's portraits, he suggested she try selling her work. She began to show her paintings at local art shows in the early 1980s and several New York City gallery owners took notice.

Today, some 30 years later, Slyman has created an expansive oeuvre of folk art, much of it found in public and private collections worldwide and other works are distributed as part of the U.S. State Department Art in Embassies. Her hand painted wooden Easter Eggs were commissioned by the Reagan White House and are, purportedly part of the Smithsonian collection while one is in the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California. Many of her canvases sell from \$300 - \$8,000.

The painting "Elephant Hotel" has already been spoken for by a collector, but a limited, signed edition of 20 giclée prints created by Ken and Ginny Ryan, owners of Somers Custom Framing and Gift Store, will be sold by the Somers Historical Society, which is

located on the third floor of the Elephant Hotel, and who will keep part of the proceeds. Currently, Slyman is working on a painting of Noah's Ark, a cat and one of children in a pasture playing with lambs. The new work promises to be as lively and spirited as the "Elephant Hotel," which begs close and contemplative viewing. As one takes in the

panorama of "Elephant Hotel" you can see an artist in his wagon traveling down the

road at the bottom right of the canvas, it's as if he is still moving.

"Whatever is going on in the painting, people are going about their business," Slyman muses. "The activity is going on whether you are looking at it or not. Life will always go on in the pictures."